

Great writer's family tree leads to village of Grudinovka

What connects Lev Tolstoy's family with a small village in the Bykhov District?

By Tatiana Annenkova

In fact, a family bearing his name lived in Grudinovka for a long time. Their home still stands, once known for its gardens and plants rare to Belarus. Relatively speaking, it also boasted well-developed infrastructure. What is the history of this wonderful place and what does the future hold?

How the Tolstoy family settled in Belarus

The Director of the Bykhov Historical Museum, Sergey Zhizhiyan, accompanies us to the village of Grudinovka, which is located near some busy roads yet remains tranquil.

"What did its name come from?" I ask and Mr. Zhizhiyan tells me, "It's quite probable that the village is named after its surroundings, since hills are common here and, probably, the village was situated on a hill. Its name comes from 'gruda' (hill). The site was owned by Polish magnates — the Khadkevichs and Sapegis — for a long time but, in 1772 'went' to Russia (after the Rzecz Pospolita's split).

On arriving at the village, we see the neglected mansion surrounded by trees. It's in good condition, still with its windows and doors, as the authorities have attempted to protect the building against vandals. Several minutes after our arrival, communal service workers came to clean the local luxurious swimming pool, which operated until the 1980s.

"Empress Yekaterina II presented the village, its bondmen and almost 19,000

arpents of land and woods to Mogilev's Governor, Duke Dmitry Tolstoy," says Sergey, continuing our excursion through the old building. Plasterwork remains on its columns, alongside a grand marble staircase which leads upstairs. The floor nearby is covered with tiles which were definitely produced before Soviet times. They are thick and, as historians believe, were popular in the days when the mansion was built.



Duchess Tolstaya at the 1903 ball

Peaches grow in local garden

Initially, the Tolstoy family lived in a wooden house built on the bank of a lake, constructing the existing mansion some time later (the exact date remains unknown). Dmitry Tolstoy's grandson — also

Dmitry — was Grudinovka's last owner from the male line. Like his grandfather, he was buried near the local church. After Dmitry's death, his wid-



Doctors of Ryzhkovo hospital built by the Duchess



The building in Soviet postwar years

ow took ownership — Alexandra Tolstaya, who restored the mansion once more.

"In 1899, Alexandra used her own money to build Ryzhkovo hospital, near Grudinovka, attracting the best doctors from the Mogilev Province. Duchess Alex-

andra Tolstaya also spent her own money on local medical staff. Jointly with her two doctors, she came to the site every year, also visiting the hospi-

chard, we see century old trees. Some time ago, greenhouses operated, with peaches and other exotic plants. A wonderful garden was filled with berries and a ten hectare English-style park stood in front of the house, adorned with oaks, spruce pine, birches, thujas and Siberian pines. Moreover, over 40 plants unique within Belarus grew in the park, with a gardener taking care of them.

After the Soviet authorities came to power, houses were built on the garden, with many plants disappearing, but the oak remains. Two people can hardly place their arms around it, making it a favourite site for photos.

butter producing facilities were also nearby, in addition to a cellar and an icehouse. All are used by the villagers now.

"The Duchess spent summers at her mansion but moved to St. Petersburg's 19 Moika Street for the winter season. She also owned a tenement building in the capital, which later passed to her daughter, Sophia. Some photos remain, showing the Duchess and her other daughter, Alexandra, at a grand costumed ball at the Winter Palace, on February 13th, 1903: the last ball given by Imperial Russia. Until now, that ball — known as 'The Ball of 1903' — has been viewed as the most famous holiday in St. Petersburg from the times of the Romanov family," says Mr. Zhizhiyan. After the Soviet authorities came to power, the Tolstoy family had to emigrate, losing their house. The fate of the mansion before the Great Patriotic War is unknown but, during the war years, it housed a hospital. After 1945, a secondary school opened and, later, a kindergarten, before the building was used as a school-orphanage for children suffering from rheumatism. "Some notes made by the orphanage's pupils have been found in the attic, telling us that an observatory was created for them on the roof," adds Sergey.

In 1963, Grudinovka's estate obtained national significance. "Several years ago, Alexandre Tolstoy, the Attaché for Culture at Minsk's French Embassy, visited Grudinovka. His father was the last governor of pre-Revolutionary St. Petersburg but, sadly, Alexandre lacks funds to restore the previously magnificent mansion," explains the historian. However, local villagers still hope to see the house restored fully one day.

Marc Chagall now enjoys modern online presence

Thanks to the Internet, anyone can visit the Museum of Marc Chagall in Vitebsk online — just visit the homepage and select 'Virtual Tour' to take a stroll through the ancient streets of the city, which is associated with the name of the artist. You can also tour the rooms of the

museum and even peruse the inner courtyard, where Chagall's apple trees grow. There stands a monument to the master, created by sculptor Valery Moguchy.

Finally, online visitors can watch the documentary *Welcome back, Marc Zakharovich!*

Funny mole

Minsk's University of Culture Gallery presents cartoon illustrations of Krtek the Mole

The animation by Czech Zdeněk Miler features 57 classic cartoons dedicated to his favourite character. His first — *How the Mole Got His Trousers* — was shown in

Prague in 1957 and was soon awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Krtek the Mole is still popular in the Czech Republic today, seen on notebooks, pencils and sweet wrappers. He has even flown into space with American astronaut Andrew Feustel.



Real interest in exhibition at University of Culture Gallery

The artist's daughter, Katarzyna Miler, has loaned 40

illustrations depicting Krtek to the Minsk gallery.